

LANGUAGE AND RACISM PART 1

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Abstract:

Generally for most people racism is primarily associated with prejudice, slavery or discrimination and not that of discourse which may seem to be just text and talk. But, according to Dijk (1999) discourse plays an important role in reproduction of modern-day racism. This is also true for the racism by the elites of politics, media, corporate, bureaucratic and education, which control the most key decisions of everyday lives of minorities and immigrants such as entry, work, residence, education, health care, welfare, knowledge, culture and information. They do this by talk and text for instance in cabinet meetings, new reports, debates, advertising, textbooks, articles, talk shows are few forms of elite discourse. It is also true that of all various other forms of racism or discrimination enacted in society against immigrants and minorities, discourse may be the first form of verbal discrimination. Thus, elite discourse is important constituent in reproduction of racism. Also, verbal and social practices enacted through talk and text reproduces ethnic prejudice or discrimination. Therefore, in modern day society, discourse is the main constituent of racism.

Key words: Racism, Discourse, Discrimination, Ideologies, Dominant groups

Racism is often understood as ethnical domination in a complex society system resulting in inequality and therefore understates it as racist ideology. Power abuse by dominant groups, organization and institutions at macro or global level and discrimination at the micro or local level by the social practices constitutes social subsystem of racism (Wellman, 1993; Omi and Winant, 1994).

Discourse is used effectively as type of discriminatory practice by the dominant groups such as elite i.e. who have their say in society and its organizations and institutions. Discrimination by dominant groups, organizations, and institutions is manifested in everyday racism and such discriminatory practices have mental basis on the ethnic events and communications prejudiced and rooted in racist ideologies (van Dijk, 1987, 1998).

Discrimination may not be intentional but they are based on the assumption that mental representations are negatively oriented. Several studies of prejudice, mostly psychology deals with the mental aspects of racism although rarely in terms of their role in racism in society. It is generally studied as individual characteristic (Brown, 1995; Zanna and Olson, 1994).

Discourse plays a major role in mental aspect of racism. Ethnic ideologies & prejudices are not inborn and such things do not develop suddenly in racial interaction. They are learned, developed through text and talk. And similarly, such mental influences are usually formulated, expressed, defended and legitimated in and through discourse and also shared & reproduced within dominant groups. Basically, in this way racism is developed and learned in society.

According to Dijk (1999), it is necessary to understand and have knowledge of racism to know how discourse is used by dominant groups to reproduce racism. Similarly, it is equally important to have knowledge about discourse. There is a perception/impression that discourse has lost its specific meaning². In general it is understood as where discourse is a communicative event and, in particular understood as oral or written type of verbal interaction.

In more generic sense, discourse is used to represent a particular type, class and a collection of discourses for example political discourse or medical discourse and certainly racist discourse (Dijk 1997). Even though it is used in such a way, ideology, philosophy, social system or movement cannot be understood by referring to the type of discourse such as liberal discourse or modern discourse without referring to the actual text or talk. In the larger sense, discourse may include/contain expressions and non-verbal actions by gestures, drawings, pictures etc. However racist messages are expressed and conveyed by gestures, movies, pictures etc.

Racism does not limit to ideology or social practices of discrimination. The same can be said about the way discourse is related to racism. Especially for meanings of discourse and also for perceptions that is for understanding mental influences. Discourses include not only social practices and communications but also the way meaning is expressed and conveyed by discourse, and influence our understanding about minorities and also immigrants.

The study of discourse structures is not only to analyze the features of particular type of discriminatory practice but also to understand the way discourse manage and influence our minds. It is particularly this type of discourse show how racial ideologies and prejudices are expressed, shared and reproduced in society.

Discourse structures can influence the mental representations we have about events, attitudes and ideologies of ethnic minorities and about us and others also. When such mental representations are influenced by the way racist discourse is intended to influence, they can be used to exercise other racist practices. Therefore, in this way forms the circle of racism.

According to the researchers, in a society racism reproduced is not equally distributed among the members of dominant group. Therefore, it is important to check few properties of discourse in social context such as who its writers and speakers are. Dijk (1993) suggests that elites play a crucial role in reproduction of racism.

This is no way means that elites are mostly racist than those who are not in elite group, but because of their privileged access and control over resources and influential public discourse, for instance politics, education, mass media and research. Here elites are not those who have access to material resources particularly in terms of power, wealth and leadership but those who have preferential access to resources such as public discourse. These elites are actually groups(of people) in society who have everything to say' and these groups have special access to minds of people, common values, concerns, opinions and aims are established in society by the ideological leaders. Common sense and consensus can be framed by the leaders and also individual of the elite groups of society.

The same is also true for practicing 'ethnic' power and needs direction in its relation to immigrants or minorities. Based on the study of role of elites in present society, we can state that they also play an important role in reproduction of racism in society that sustains the dominant group in power.

In addition to this, political and sociological study is essential to examine how elites affect people at large by propagation and integrating popular confusion into different types of racist discourse by dominant groups to be relevant and sustain their status and power. For example, criticism for lack of employment against elites that is those in power deflects the blame onto immigrants. Moreover, extreme forms of racism in political parties may make them to publicly reject to protect their non-racist image and to distribute moderate type of racism in political parties.

This perspective that elite groups play a crucial role in reproduction of racism is based on the argument that they have access to and control over public discourse. For the leaders to be responsible and example, anti-racist policies should be focused on the leaders more than on the population who do not play an important role in reproduction of racism.



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